

national park service

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HISTORIC MORSE CODE RADIO STATION RETURNS TO THE AIR

Former "Wireless Giant of the Pacific" Will Once Again Be Heard

The former Marconi and RCA Morse code radio station KPH will make a commemorative broadcast on Wednesday, 12 July, the first anniversary of the last commercial Morse code transmission in North America.

KPH began its life at the dawn of radio. Its first home was the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, from which it derived its first call letters, PH. When the Palace Hotel was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire the station moved to several different locations, eventually finding a permanent home on the mesa west of the small California town of Bolinas. Along the way federal regulators added the K prefix to the original PH, creating KPH, one of the most famous radio call signs in the world.

Radio operators ashore and afloat came to regard KPH as "the wireless giant of the Pacific". Only the best operators worked at KPH. They were there 24 hours a day, ready to help with everything from the mundane messages of maritime commerce to urgent requests for assistance from ships in distress. The KPH signal literally spanned the globe. Radio operators on ships in the far corners of the world were comforted by the steady signal of KPH in their earphones.

As technology progressed the end of Morse code was predicted many times. But KPH soldiered on providing good, reliable service to the maritime community. The end came at Bolinas in 1997 when Globe Wireless purchased the license and the big transmitters were finally shut down. On July 12, 1999 Globe Wireless sent the last commercial messages in Morse code from KFS, their master station near Half Moon Bay. It was the last time the famous call KPH would be heard on the air - or so it was thought.

Today the former KPH facilities are part of the Point Reyes National Seashore which has a strong interest in the important role the station played in the history of radio communications. The Maritime Radio Historical Society has been working with the Point Reyes National Seashore to preserve and restore KPH with the goal of eventually creating a museum dedicated to this great station that was once heard throughout the world.

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Point Reyes National Seashore

Point Reyes Station, California 94956

On July 12, KPH will return to the air from its original location, using its original equipment and its original frequencies - generously made available by Globe Wireless, the current owner of the KPH license and operator of the equally famous KFS from which the last commercial Morse message was sent.

Veteran operators, radio engineers and those with an interest in radio history will gather at the Bolinas transmitter building to watch the station come on the air one year and one minute after the last Morse transmission from Half Moon Bay. The operators who once stood watch at the station will send commemorative messages by hand. At which point they will listen for any calls from the few remaining ships at sea with Morse capability.

While this event does not signal the return of KPH to commercial Morse service we intend it to acknowledge and honor all the radio operators who have “worn the earphones” and played a role in the history of maritime radio.

The station will operate on 4247.0, 6477.5 and 13002.0Kc on shortwave and 500/426Kc. on medium wave. If additional frequencies become available by July 12 these will be announced during the commemorative broadcast.

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